

*Rosalie.* His lordship did not come in till five o'clock.

*Lady Windermere.* Five o'clock? He knocked at my door this morning, didn't he?

*Rosalie.* Yes, my lady—at half-past nine. I told him your ladyship was not awake yet.

*Lady Windermere.* Did he say anything?

*Rosalie.* Something about your ladyship's fan. I didn't quite catch what his lordship said. Has the fan been lost, my lady? I can't find it, and Parker says it was not left in any of the rooms. He has looked in all of them and on the terrace as well.

*Lady Windermere.* It doesn't matter. Tell Parker not to trouble, That will do. [Exit

*Rosalie.*

*Lady Windermere.* [Rising.] She is sure to tell him. I can fancy a person doing a wonderful act of self-sacrifice, doing it spontaneously, recklessly, nobly—and afterwards finding out that it costs too much. Why should she hesitate between her ruin and mine? . . . How strange! I would have publicly disgraced her in my own house. She accepts public disgrace in the house of another to save me. . . There is a bitter irony in things, a bitter irony in the way we talk of good and bad women. . . . Oh, what a lesson! and what a pity that in life we only get our lessons when they are of no use to us! For even if she doesn't tell, I must. Oh! the shame of it, the shame of it. To tell it is to live through it all again. Actions are the first tragedy in life, words are the second. Words are perhaps the worst. Words are merciless. . . . Oh! [Starts as Lord

*Windermere enters.*

*Lord Windermere.* [Kisses her.] Margaret—how pale you look!

*Lady Windermere.* I slept very badly.

*Lord Windermere.* [Sitting on sofa with her.] I am so sorry. I came in dreadfully late, and didn't like to wake you. You are crying, dear.

*Lady Windermere.* Yes, I am crying, for I have something to tell you, Arthur.

*Lord Windermere.* My dear child, you are not well. You've been doing too much. Let us go away to the country. You'll be all right at Selby. The season is almost over. There is no use staying on. Poor darling! We'll go away to-day, if you like. [Rises.] We can easily catch the 3.40. I'll send a wire to Fannen.

[Crosses and sits down at table to write a telegram.

*Lady Windermere.* Yes; let us go away to-day. No; I can't go